

## [Will L. Farnum]

Form A

Circumstances of Interview No. 3

State— Vermont

Name of Worker— Charles F. Derven

Address— Poultney, Vermont

Date— August 24, 1938

Subject—— Folklore

1. Interview on August 24, 1938 at 2:30 p.m.
2. At the informant's home
3. Informant— Mr. Will L. Farnum, North Poultney, Vermont
4. Miss Edith Ward, librarian, Poultney, Vermont put me in touch with the informant.
5. Unaccompanied.
6. The Farnum homestead is an old Colonial farmhouse, which was partly constructed in 1819, on the original lot no. 40 of the Poultney division. The lot was bought from the original grantee by an early ancestor of the present Mr. W. L. Farnum. The house is located in North Poultney on a cross road running from the main highway between Poultney and [Castleton?] Corners. The tracks of the Delaware and Hudson railroad pass over the cross road not far from the farm.

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One crosses open meadow land to reach the farm, but a short distance from it the ground rises to form a sort of knoll. On this raised elevation there are many trees which provided shelter from wind and sun, and consequently the buildings and the lawn are shaded and cool. A few slate quarries are prominent further down the road to the west, and other farms stand nearby. From the lawn one can see cars passing on the main highway across the fields, and see and hear the trains which steam down the track.

The buildings are clean and fresh in appearance, revealing generations of careful attendance. Recently a coat of white paint has been added to the house, and the odor of it could be faintly sensed. The shutter are dark green in pleasant contrast with the white. Hanging on each side of the doors are ornamental lantern lights. Red paint covers the barn in the customary style of many Vermont farms. Later, it was discovered that the doors of the cow barn were once on an old distillery in North Poultney.

The house, although small and unpretentious, is well fitted inside and out. Many things characteristic of New England homes are noticed when one enters. There are two fireplaces, now walled up, and in connection with the larger, which has a chimney big enough to allow two men to stand side by side in it, is an old fireless oven. Wall cupboards, filled with many valuable, leather bound volumes, are situated on each side of the fireplace which is in the oldest section of the house. The addition to the original building is larger, and contains the larger fireplace, which opens into [rooms?] adjoining rooms. Almost all of the furniture could be classed as antique, and would be cherished by a collector of early craftsmanship. However, many modern implements, fixtures, and articles rest among them. The woodwork is plain, white painted, and the walls are papered in flat tones, giving a wholesome, and dignified atmosphere to the rooms. A scent of the past still lingers, and adds an emotional tone to the place. Only those who know that rare, and pleasant odor which can be realised in clean, old farmhouses can appreciate the memories which it is capable of arousing.

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The owner, who dwells there alone, showed me over the house and exhibited many priceless antiques, curies, and other things of interest from the past and present. He gladly related the history of his ancestors, of the house, of his immediate family, and of many articles. Among other things, he showed a family bible, published in 1769, containing records of the family from early years. It was an afternoon to be remembered.

Form B

Personal History of the Informant

State—Vermont

Name of Worker— Charles F. Derven

Address— Poultney

Date— August 24, 1938

Subject— Folklore

1. Ancestry— Mr. W. L. Farnum's ancestors are English
2. Born in North Poultney, at present home, in 1867.
3. Family— He is the only surviving one of his family.
4. Has lived in present home all his life.
5. Education [Elementary school?] — self-educated by reading
6. Farmer
7. Interested in books, physical [?] [are?], farming, and [antiques?].

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8. [Madonic?] Order

9. He is a small man, standing about five feet and six inches, and slight of build. Although over seventy, he has been very active up to now, and except for a touch of rheumatism in his right leg, is healthy and vital in appearance. Always athletic by nature, he recalls that he could perform gymnastic feats pretty well in years past, and could now if he [didn?] did not have that ailment. I believed him. There is a merry and satisfied expression in his eyes, and a certainty in his manner. He does not look a day over sixty, and was pleased to hear me say it. His sense of humor is always uppermost in discussing [ ??] people and things. He is cultured and refined, in fact, a true country gentleman.

Form C— Text of I nterview No. 3.

State- Vermont

Name of Worker— Charles F. Derven

Address— Poultney

Date— August 24, 1938

Subject— Folklore

In years past a distillery wag in operation at North Poultney. On Sundays a certain group of men, who were not in the habit of going to church, used to gather there to drink, and enjoy themselves.

At that time church attendance was very important to the people of Poultney. Anyone who missed church was visited by the elders of the church so that they could make the person mend his ways. This practice was called " laboring with him."

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The men, who attended the distillery on Sundays decided to keep attendance also. They had a roll written in white chalk on the doors, and held mock services. Anyone who was absent from the meeting was visited, and the men " labored with him."

Mr. W. L. Farnum has the doors of the old distillery on his cow barn. He says that the chalk marks used to be visible, but that the barn was white-washed and the marks are now covered.

### Cures and Remedies

"Squeeze the dust from a puff-ball onto a wound to stop bleeding."

Animal ( Lore ) — Superstitions.

"Butcher hogs in the dark of the moon, and the pork will shrink. It must be done with a full moon. "

The man who told Mr. Farnum this, said, " I know it's so! "

(Grave robbing to [procure?] corpses for medical use is supposed to have been practised in Castleton, Vermont, when the Castleton Medical School was in existence. )

A grave was robbed in Hubbardton, and a woman's body taken from it. The authorities thought that the medical students in Castleton might have done the deed. So they came to search the school for her body. They searched through the buildings, and were about to give up when someone noticed that new nails had been driven into the planking of the attic floor. The boards were quickly removed. In the opening was the corpse. But the head was missing.

No one found the head.

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Since then people say that one of the doctors, who was wearing a great, flowing cape, had the head hidden under his cape during the entire investigation !

( Eliakim Doolittle, known as “Uncle Kim” to the inhabitants of East Poultney, was a brilliant but eccentric man. He eventually went “cuckoo”, or “batty”, according to those who remember him. Gifted in musical ability, but inclined to absent-mindedness, and peculiarities of manner, he afforded the local people much amusement.

“ Uncle Kim ” was very well educated, having attended Yale in his early years. He was born in Connecticut in 1780, and later moved to East Poultney, where he lived the rest of his life. He wrote hymns, and gave music lessons. Many stories of him are told, including practical jokes pulled on him, and of his remarks. \*\*\*\*

“Uncle Kim” was a character who lived in East Poultney years ago. He was a brilliant man but eventually went cuckoo. People enjoyed pulling practical jokes on him because of his peculiar way of responding.

He had made a collection of some old bones and trash, and piled them up in the fields near his home. One of the young boys, who was full of the devil, scattered the bones all over the fields. “Uncle Kim” saw him doing it, and “blasted” him in loud tones. He could always be counted on to “blast” anybody who annoyed him.

Another time he was passing some men who were shearing sheep. One of the men noticed “Uncle Kim's” flowing locks, and decided to have some fun. He cut “Uncle Kim's” hair with the sheep shears. After that when anybody wanted to scare him, or get rid of him, they would pick up a shears and advanced toward him. “Uncle Kim” would blast them and run away.

“Uncle Kim” was a musician. He composed and played instruments as well. One day, as he was passing a singing class which was rehearsing in one of the halls, he noticed the leader beating time with his baton. The street where the building was located is supposed

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to have been called "Pucker Street". Uncle Kim imitated the leader, swinging his arms, and shouting, " Up East street. Down West Street. Pucker Street, boo! " in time With his movements. The old Turnpike which ran through Poultney until the coming of the railroads around the middle of the last century, had many toll gate". One of these was located in North Poultney, (not fur distant from Mr. Farnum's home), on what is now the Poultney-Castleton road.

At times some person would be traveling on the turnpike with a wagon load, and wish to avoid paying the charges at the toll gate. A short distance from the North Poultney gate there was a road which led up over the hills off the main road. A man who lived in a house located by this road was often asked whether one could escape the gate in anyway. He would reply that by taking the road over the hills, the gate could be skipped. The driver would then proceed over the hill road, which wad steep and very hard work for horses to cross while pulling a loaded wagon. Much to his surprise, the driver, after having struggled over the hill read, would find that it brought him right out in front of the toll gate!

### The Escapades of Harv Smith

"Harv" Smith lived in North Poultney years ago. He was a great practical joke lover, and pulled some pretty good ones. He was well known for his ready wit.

One day as he approached two local men, both named Will, walking on the road, he said, " I am about in the act of pasting a couple of counterfeit bills."

He had a brother named Theophilus. A neighborhood group were talking about Theophilus one day, and "Harv" said, " He's Theophilus the awfulest) Smith I know."

"Harv" got a bottle of concentrated skunk's essence somewhere and decided he ought to have some fun with it. Since he was an accomplished ventriloquist, he conceived a good idea. Calling on one of the neighbors he opened the bottle, by-[pulling the?]-cork-out-[?]-and leaving it hidden in his pocket, allowed the scent to fill the room. Then he peeped like

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a chicken. The family rushed out to save the chickens from a skunk. "Harv" joined in the search, and when no skunk was discovered, returned to the house, and pulled the stunt again.

Harv " used to recite the following about one of his neighbors: There is a tavern in our town  
And near it lives old Rozel Brown He chaws his tobacco very thin And all the juice runs  
down his chin.